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ABSTRACT

This report describes the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a project designed to keep parents, school officials, and policy makers abreast of the educational realities. Information is collected and reported at regular intervals concerning the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of elementary and secondary school students. NAEP has developed educational objectives based upon the consensus of concerned citizens. Exercises written to fit these objectives are evaluated by educators before being administered to students. The results of each assessment are published, and total results are summarized to indicate the relative performance of specific groups. By regular monitoring of students' progress, NAEP is able to determine developing trends and potential problems. Information about young adults, ages 21 to 25, is also being compiled by NAEP, which reports useful information not only to the federal government but also to the individual states. (DWH)

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National Assessment of Educational Progress

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Bringing the future into focus

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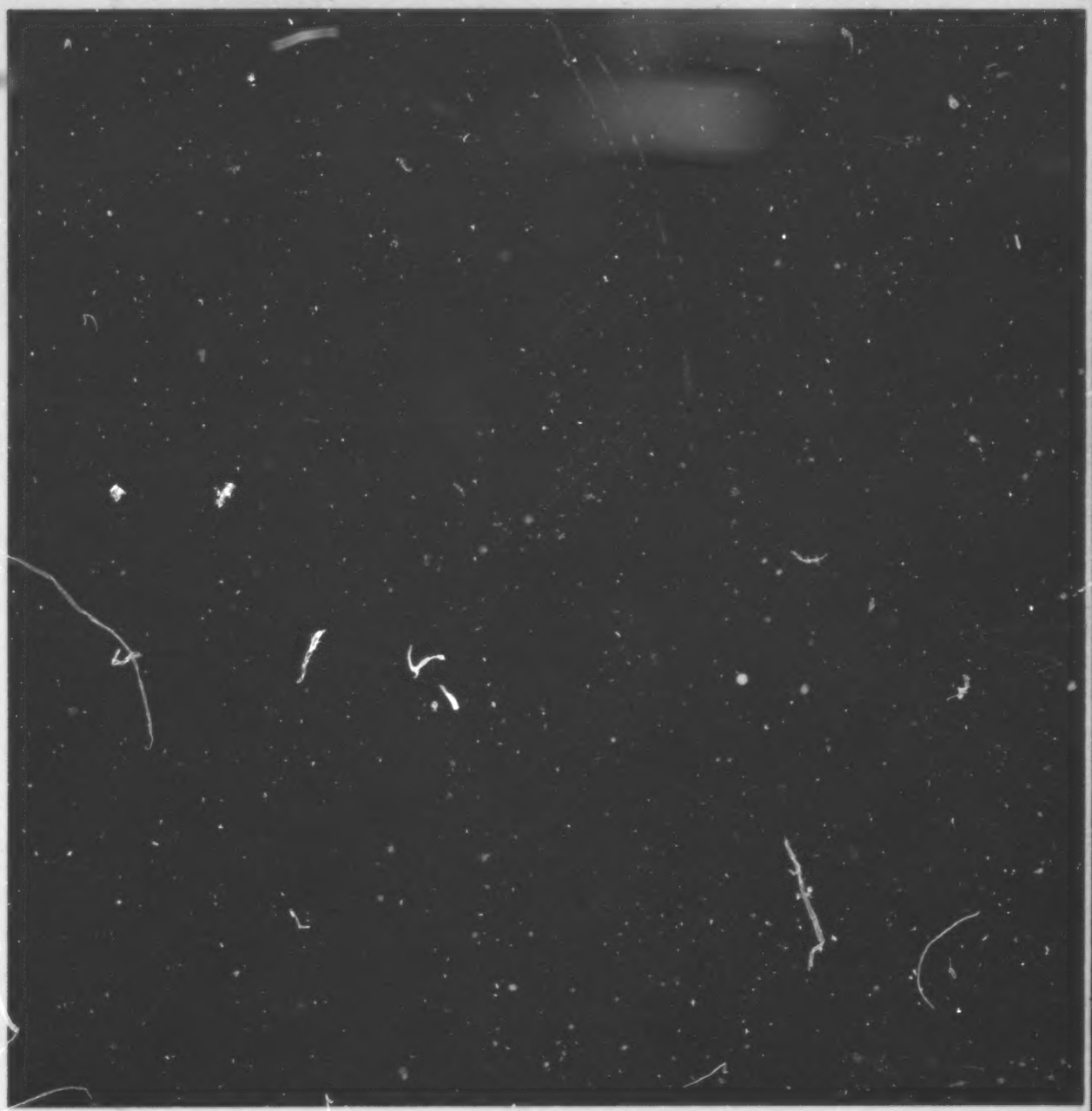


The future exists only in our imagination.

TODAY'S ESTIMATES . . . TOMORROW'S FACTS

Planning for education, or anything else, involves the future, and the future exists only in our imagination. How vividly and accurately we predict it, how clearly we bring it into focus, depends, in large part, on how firm a grasp we have on the past and present. Only by knowing the realities of where we've been and where we are now and what's happened in between can we hope to estimate with any reasonable accuracy where we're heading.

1

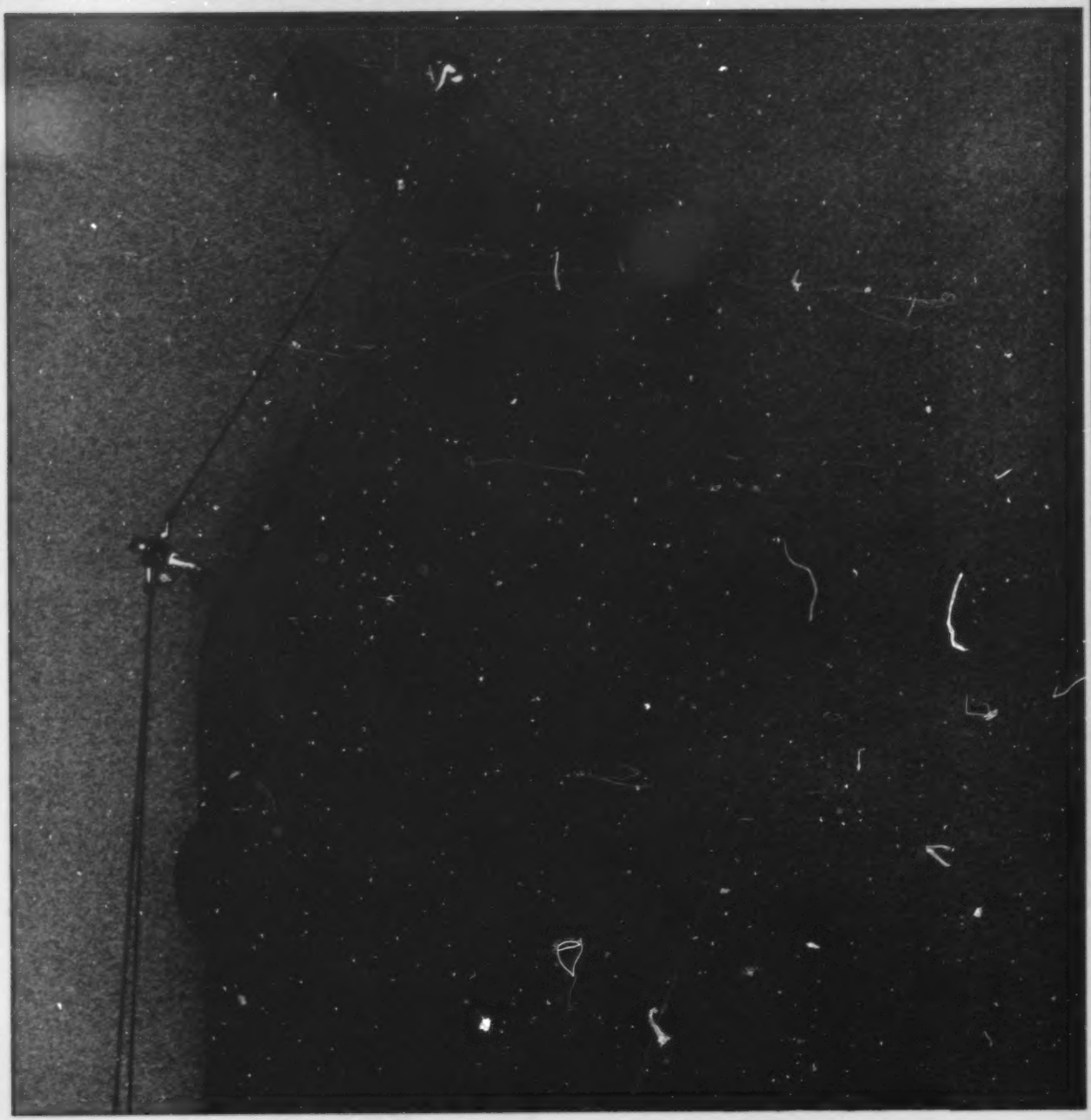
NAEP reports regularly on the educational realities—the good news as well as the bad.

REPORTING ON THE REALITIES

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the only project of its kind in the nation that reports regularly on the educational realities—the good news as well as the bad—to parents, principals, and policy makers throughout the nation. Established in 1969 by the (then) U.S. Office of Education, NAEP provides a measure of how much the nation's public and independent school students and young adults are learning and have learned.

For almost two decades, NAEP has served as the nation's report card, regularly collecting and reporting information about the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of nine-, 13-, and 17-year-olds in writing, reading, mathematics, science, literature, art, music, social studies, computer competence, citizenship, and career and occupational development. The NAEP data base is comprised of well over a million students.

The National Assessment is funded by the National Institute of Education and is administered by Educational Testing Service (ETS) as an activity of its Center for the Assessment of Educational Progress.



HOW DO YOU MEASURE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION?

How do you measure the quality of a nation's education? What kinds of things should nine-year-olds know how to write? What kinds of materials should 13-year-olds be able to read? What should 17-year-olds know about science? Through the years, NAEP has worked out answers to questions like these by developing objectives based on the consensus of concerned citizens across the nation. Persuading scholars, teachers, school administrators, physicians, lawyers, tradespeople, business executives, homemakers, and others to agree on answers to such questions is a formidable task. Yet during the late sixties and early seventies, the first objectives for the subject areas covered by NAEP were hammered out, reshaped, and then hammered out again by committee members until consensus was finally reached. As Ralph Tyler, one of NAEP's architects, wrote in 1965, ". . . the procedure is designed to insure that every objective being assessed is considered important by scholars, is accepted as an educational task by the school, and is deemed desirable by leading lay citizens. . . ."

C.

- 3:20
- 3:40
- 4:08
- 8:20
- I don't know.

NEW YORK—WASHINGTON FARES

BETWEEN	Metroliner Coach	Coach	Metroclub	Parlor Car
NEW YORK and				
Trenton	$ 6.50	$ 3.50	$11.40	$ 6.90
Philadelphia	8.25	5.25	14.15	9.65
Wilmington	9.50	6.50	17.00	12.50
Baltimore	16.75	10.75	27.15	19.65
Capital Beltway	18.50	[illegible]	30.40	22.90
Washington	19.00	[illegible]	30.90	23.40

A. Which type of train travel is cheapest?

- Metroliner Coach
- Coach
- Metroclub
- Parlor Car
- I don't know.

I like rock & roll music the best because its makes me get up and want to sing and it it make me feel good, and sometim so depressed at most of the I just like to listen I'm doing my homework or something.

32. Draw a large X on the living thing in this picture that makes oxygen in the presence of sunlight.

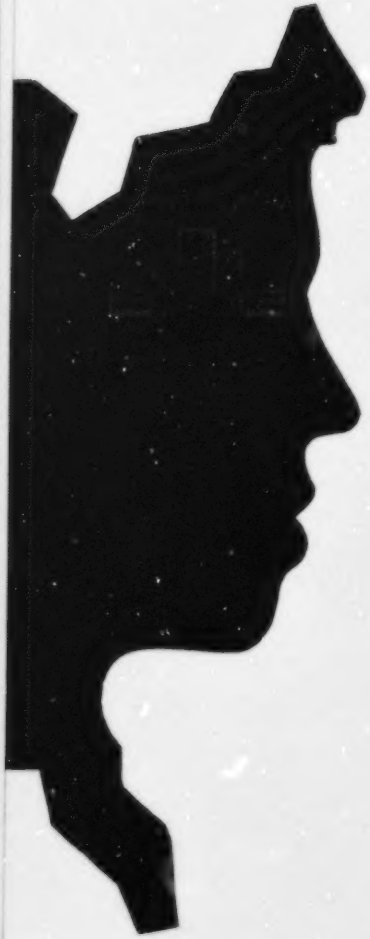
NAEP exercises are presented in a variety of formats.

The questions, or exercises, written to fit NAEP's objectives are developed by having educators from all parts of the country work with specialists at Educational Testing Service. The exercises are evaluated by educators on the basis of their academic appropriateness, effectiveness, and freedom from bias or from stereotyping, and their sensitivity to racial, ethnic, religious, or political groups.

The exercises span a wide range of difficulty and are presented in a variety of formats. Many exercises are of the familiar multiple-choice type; others require the student to write essays or short responses. Some NAEP exercises are administered by interviewers.

Until recently, the National Assessment reported information about students' learning every year. Today, NAEP reports to the nation every other year but now provides information by grade (3, 7, and 11) as well as by age (9, 13, and 17).

A nationally representative sample of American elementary and secondary schools and students



THE NAEP SAMPLE

The National Assessment collects information from a nationally representative sample of American elementary and secondary schools and students. In 1983-84, the sample consisted of about 1600 public and non-public schools and about 100,000 students in four regions of the country spanning 30 states. The schools range in size, location, and type from large urban systems to the most remote, rural, one-room settings. The NAEP sample includes students who speak limited English and those who are functionally handicapped. Moreover, the sampling procedures are being refined to gain more accurate representation of major cultural subgroups of Hispanic students such as Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Mexican-American. Now, too, for the first time in more than a decade, NAEP is sampling young adults (see page 15).

Report Card

NAEP National Sample of 9-Year-Olds

	1975	1980	1985
Reading			
Math	−	+	+
Writing	improved	fair	poor
Science			

naep

Monitoring and reporting regularly on the status of students' progress

WHAT'S IN THE NATION'S REPORT CARD

After each assessment, NAEP reports the results for each exercise used and summaries of the results of all exercises to show the relative performance of particular groups (such as White or Black students, boys or girls). Superintendents, chief state school officers, and other administrators may get this information categorized according to age, race, sex, geographic region, level of parental education, type and size of community, and other descriptors. Moreover, NAEP data are helping school administrators address policy issues concerning the preparation and experience of teachers, availability of special programs and services, the school climate, quality of textbooks, instructional use of computers, and numerous other everyday realities of the schools. The results of each assessment are evaluated in terms of how well the nation and groups of students within it are meeting certain objectives established by national consensus. No individual states, schools, or students are identified.

Because it functions as the nation's report card, monitoring and reporting regularly on the status of students' progress, NAEP is able to point up trends that are taking shape and problems that are developing. For example, in the last decade, there were encouraging improvements in basic reading and mathematics skills among Black students, some disadvantaged groups, and among low achievers. Declines in higher-level reading performance occurred at age 17. The largest declines were among the nation's best students.

NAEP is able to point up trends that are taking shape.

In science, NAEP found that while all three age groups reported greater participation in this activity, achievement by 17-year-olds has declined and that of 13-year-olds has neither improved nor declined. Nine-year-olds showed mixed results.

NAEP reports are not limited to information about academic performance. As a result of a 1979-80 study, NAEP reported that among nine-year-olds, more time spent watching television tended to be positively associated with achievement (except for the heaviest watchers of five hours or more). Performance among 17-year-olds improved with increasing time spent on homework assignments. Fifty-nine percent of the nine-year-olds, 72 percent of the 13-year-olds, and 75 percent of the 17-year-olds said they spent less than one hour or none of their time reading for their own enjoyment.

Much of the National Assessment data has to do with students' attitudes. In recent years, for example, NAEP reported that an increasing number of 13- and 17-year-olds were convinced that science cannot help resolve the world's problems of energy, pollution, food shortages, and limited natural resources. On the other hand, Black nine-year-olds had a more positive attitude about science careers than they had five years earlier.

21 to 25

highest proportion of unemployed
one quarter of the work force
most recent products of our schools
the years when adult work is begun
still young enough to profit from remedial programs

NAEP is once more reporting on young adults.

A SURVEY OF YOUNG ADULTS

Information about young adults, those recently graduated from high school and college and beginning to enter the work force, is essential to the nation's planners. Constituting a quarter of the work force and the highest proportion of the nation's unemployed, young adults represent the most recent products of our educational system who are still young enough to profit from remedial programs. In its first years, NAEP routinely reported on this segment of the population but subsequently discontinued this activity for lack of funds. Today, NAEP is active once more in this area, drawing a literacy profile of a representative sample of the 20 million men and women of 21 to 25 throughout the nation. The assessment is reporting on the reading, writing, and computation skills (including problem solving and higher-order reasoning) of this population and relating this information to demographic, educational, cultural, attitudinal, and other background data. Ultimately, NAEP hopes to determine the range of literacy levels that exists in the nation and the approximate percentage of young adults who can function at each.

CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

CONDUCTING THEIR OWN CONCURRENT ASSESSMENTS COMPARE THEIR DATA WITH NAEP'S NATIONWIDE SAMPLE.

FEDERAL OFFICIALS

STUDY NAEP DATA RELATING ACHIEVEMENT TO SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT, TEACHING STRATEGIES, AND STUDENTS' BACKGROUNDS AND ATTITUDES.

SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

USE NAEP RESULTS TO SEE WHAT PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE BY STUDENTS INVOLVED IN FUNDING, TUTORING, OR OTHER SPECIAL PROGRAMS.

MEMBERS OF CONGRESS AND STATE LEGISLATORS

FACED WITH CRITICAL VOTING DECISIONS USE NAEP REPORTS FOR BACKGROUND INFORMATION.

NAEP helps many different people in many different ways.

HOW NAEP CAN HELP

The National Assessment of Educational Progress helps many different people in many different ways. School superintendents, for example, can see from NAEP data what progress has been made by students involved in funding, tutoring, or other special programs. Members of Congress and state legislatures who are faced with critical voting decisions use NAEP data for background information. Members of school boards use the national objectives established for NAEP in arriving at objectives and standards for learning in their own districts. Federal officials study NAEP data relating achievement to school environment, teaching strategies, and students' backgrounds and attitudes.

The National Assessment was designed to function as much for the individual states as for the nation. In addition to reporting useful information, NAEP has, through the years, helped states and school districts within them to conduct their own assessments. More than 45 states have carried out their own evaluation programs following the NAEP model or using NAEP services. In recent years, states such as Wyoming and New York have conducted assessments concurrently with the National Assessment. This option has enabled superintendents to compare results of their districts with those of the state and the nation.

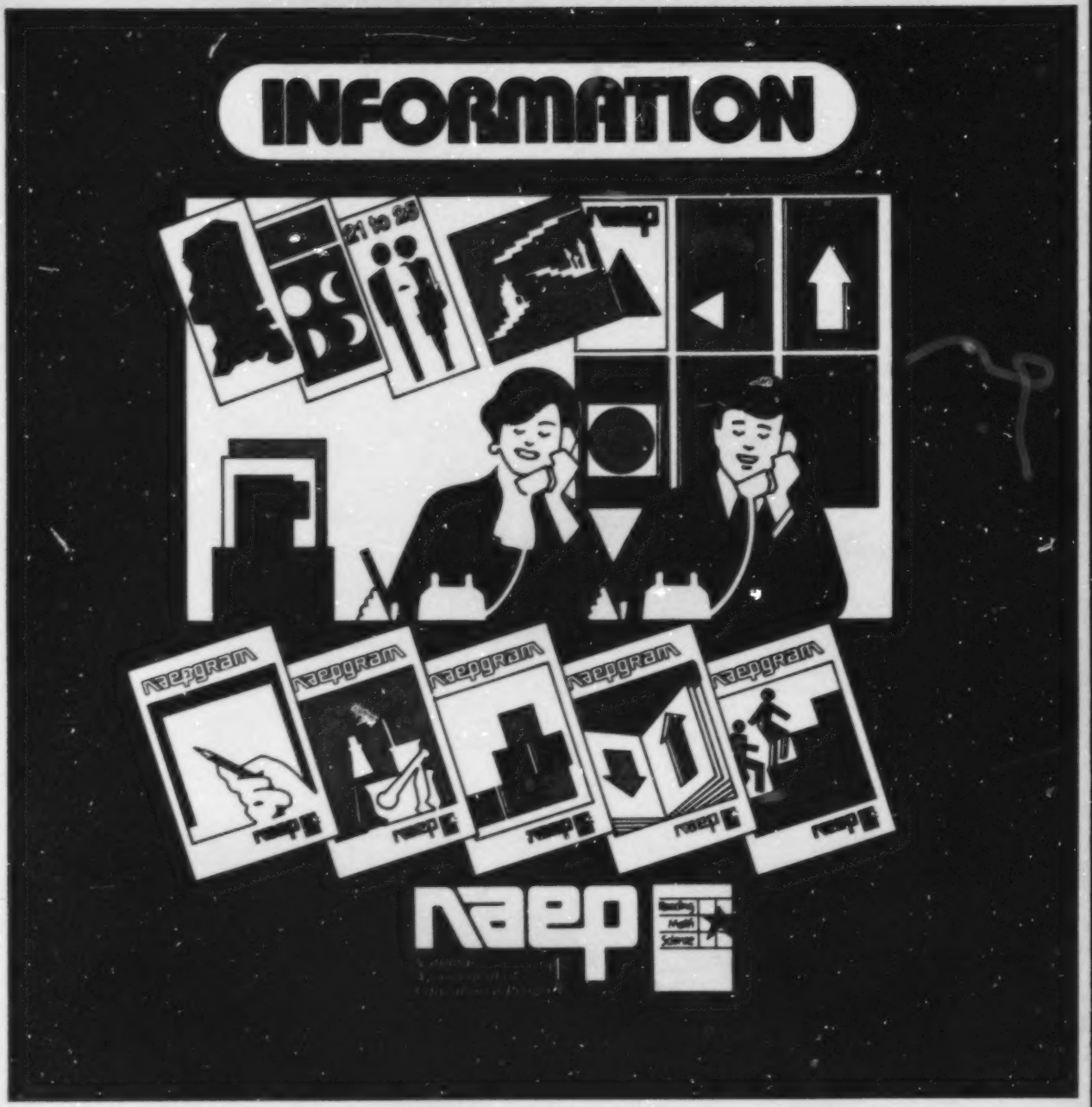
The APC membership reflects the diversity of the nation's population.

WHO'S IN CHARGE OF NAEP

The governing agency of the National Assessment of Educational Progress is the National Insriture of Education, but decisions about the scope and direction of the program are the responsibility of the Assessment Policy Committee (APC). The APC is composed of outstanding representatives from the fields of education, business, government, journalism, and professional associations who reflect the diversity of the nation's population with regard to sex, race, ethnicity, and region.

ONE FINAL THOUGHT

Planning for the future is always suspenseful, especially when that future involves the education of children. The only way to approach such a task is through careful evaluation—determining where you are, where you've been, and where you're going. This means knowing all the story, both the good news and the bad, the humdrum and the headline grabbers. Only the National Assessment of Educational Progress provides that kind of service.



If you need information about NAEP

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you would like more information about NAEP, write to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, CN 6710, Princeton, New Jersey 08541-6710, or call (800) 223-0267.

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Illustrations by Jack Weaver

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